



**Doing
the
Most
Good**

The Salvation Army-Family Intervention Service The Independent Living Skills Program



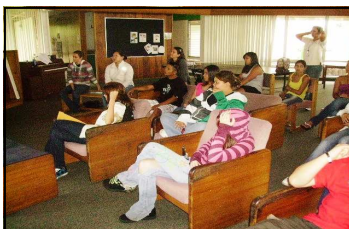
NA HO`OLA PONO



“Moving Towards a Life of Righteousness”

Housing Options: More Than Where the Heart Is

March is usually ILP's time to present vital information on what housing options are available to young people preparing to enter college after graduation. Every year, between 80% to 85% of the youth we work with chooses college as their post-high option, but for



We began our ILP activity with a presentation by the UH Hilo Housing staff before taking a tour of the dorms.

many housing may still be an issue. For this reason, ILP has strengthened effective partnerships with both the student housing at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo and the Office of Housing and Community Development. On March 10, 2010, we took our ILP participants to UH Hilo to hear a presentation on student housing. The housing staff were gracious in providing valuable information to our ILP students. They highlighted a lot of the benefits of attending college

and residing in the student dorms. They talked about fun events the housing provide where dorms are able to compete against other dorms in friendly competi-



Our ILP participants had the chance to walk through the freshman dorms to get a better idea of dorm-life.

tion. They also spoke of the weekend fieldtrips they offer, like whale-watching and Hapuna Beach activities. Last year they even had a block party at the dorms with music and entertainment. Some of last year's ILP graduates who are currently residing in the dorms gave a presentation of their dorm-life ex-



Former ILP youths now residing in the dorm provides valuable insights of their experiences living on campus and how it adds to their college goals.

periences and the benefits of living in the dorm while attending college. Our youths also had the opportunity to walk through the freshman dorms and student residence cafeteria. Independent Living Skills Program, on March 24, 2010, took our ILP participants to the County of Hawai'i, Office of Housing and Community Development. Over the years we have developed an effective partnership with the County Housing Office in bringing about a greater awareness as to valuable housing options and resources our youths in foster care are entitled to.

At one of the County Housing conference rooms, we were met by Sharon Hirota, who oversees the Landlord Tenant-



Our ILP participants listening to vital housing resources available.

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The Salvation Army-Family Intervention Services

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Volume 1 Issue 10

Newsletter Date

March 2010

Mission Statement

“To provide youth with skills for a healthy life and to instill purpose, hope and vision to youth and their families.”



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The Journey: The Sum of Life's Experiences

The Journey is an attempt to help adolescents embrace the inevitable crises of their lives in a creative and proactive way. The Journey is not a prevention program; it does not try to stop anything from happening. Rather, it seeks to create a sanctioned, supportive environment which honors the events of an ado-



lescent's life for what they are, and invites them as individuals and as a group to find "the meaning in the



mess" of their life experiences. It is a privilege and responsibility for each adolescent to find his or her own path in life and to share what is learned from walking that unique path. To better understand who they are by reflecting on their lives. By creating an environment where such a thing is possible, we empower youths to be responsible to themselves, to prove to themselves that they are able to handle all that life brings.

On the 25th and 26th of March, we took a selected group of our ILP youths on this Journey. There were some concerns prior to doing the



Journey project, because our participants were expected to reflect on their past life experiences, both the good as well as the bad. Though the program's fears were warranted, we felt that we had that vital level of trust that was neces-



sary for us to guide our participants through the process. The Journey is an intensive process that usually takes up to four to five days, but due to budget constraints, we only had two days. It forced us to work from the early morning hours to the late hours at night. We started our day on a cold and rainy morning at Wailoa State Park, where we introduced the Journey they were to embark on. Our first and most im-



portant activity was Mask-making. We were expected to use our masks throughout the Journey activities. The mask played an important role for our youth, not only in discovering who they were, but also how they had hidden behind their masks their fears, their hurt and their past. Each youth also had to have a high level of trust with their partners. It was very claustrophobic for some, especially not being able

to talk or even laugh. It took from half an hour to 45 minutes for each person to complete the first phase of their masks. We played background music and encouraged our youths to relax while applying each strip of bandage on to their faces laden with Vaseline. It took several hours for our participants to complete all their masks. Just in time for lunch. We then organized the group for a shopping activity at KTA Stores and proceeded to Kilauea Military Camp where we had rented a 5 bedroom cabin. After settling down at KMC, each participant were given a folder that included their agendas. They all had written in their journals, recording their experiences throughout the activity. Throughout the day, they had a lot of activities, such as creating Life Maps, Who Am I exercises and Secret Shout Outs that included positive comments for their fellow participants. We had several late visitors by our program



Director, Denise Pacheco and Human Resources personnel, Michael Chung, who is an avid supporter of the Journey project. It was encouraging to see their support for everyone participating in this project, both the youth as well as the staff. Staying up at Kilauea Volcano also had that surreal atmosphere, knowing that we were just a stone's throw from the creation of new

Journey: Understanding the Past, Embracing the Future

land. And for some of us, the chance to create a new beginning too. Besides being a foster youth, it was clear that our common hurt, pain and past difficulties brought us all closer together than we've ever been before. We shared a lot of our deep emotions, our fears and a lot of tears. Though a lot of the night events revealed painful, hidden experiences, it also led them towards a much deserved healing process. It was great hearing them



chanting out, "The healing starts now!". That I believe was a very empowering moment for not only the youths that participated, but for the staff as well. There was a visible and powerful transformation of the participants from the start of the Journey to that point. The Journey took our youths from not knowing who they were to acknowledging themselves as "survivors" and recognizing all the imposing obstacles and challenges they had overcome. The Journey gave them a renewed confidence of their expected future challenges and obsta-



cles that they all knew awaited them. We asked our participants several questions. **What did you like about the Journey experience? How will you apply what you learned through the Journey activities to help you towards establishing a better future for yourself?** KP said, "During the Journey, I found out who I was with the help of my peers. I knew that if I felt they would help me get back up, but I would have to dust myself off. Finding out who I am is very important for my future." BR commented, "I liked that everyone felt like family, something that some of us missed. Even in our foster homes that we were place with. I will apply what I learned towards my future, because I've come to grips with all the bad in my past and I don't want to go back there. We need to move forward." We also asked, **"Are there risks doing the Journey, especially for foster youths because of their histories. Do you think that the Journey may be exposing foster youth to further risks or harm?"** BR said, "Personally I don't think so, but I cannot speak for anyone else. I believe that everything that happened



to me on the Journey had a purpose and it was a good, learning experience for me." MF said, "Well, if people are worried that the kids participating will "break down", they shouldn't be going to the program, but it shouldn't hurt you any worse than you may have already been hurt. I broke down, but for me it was the staff that I had the utmost respect and trust in, that built me back up. Everyone, even my peers were there for one another." They unanimously voted that the Journey would make positive differences for other foster youths and they all wanted to come back and volunteer as peer facilitators. We do a lot for all the the youths we work for and we try to develop many unique, hand-on ways of bringing vital information to them, but the Journey was the most, unique and empowering event I ever had the opportunity to experience. The staff have grown from the experience, much like the young people that have taken the chance to be part of this important Journey, but they all know, the Journey continues.





Our ILP youths waving signs for Drug Prevention Month in February. They all vowed to stay drug-free and to keep making positive choices.



Housing

Rental Agreement Program that was funded under Obama's Economic Stimulus Bill. This program provides rental assistance services very much like the one that Section 8 offers. Unlike the Section 8 program, instead of being on the waiting list for 5 to 6 years, our youths that meet the eligibility criteria will only have to wait 3 to 6 months. Our youths would also be allowed to apply for the Section 8 program and will be given special preference, which equates to a much shorter waiting.

Our youths were excited when told how much rent they were responsible to pay. They were told that they would have to pay only 20% of their income. They later found out that, if attending college their financial aid and higher education payments are not counted as income. Before this activity, one ILP youth joked that ILP helps him with admission and financial aid to go to college, but will need to sleep in the park with no place to live. Our ILP youths were very excited at the real possibilities of having a home of their own. Good News and Good Luck!



Why Independent Living Program? by RA

I have been a foster youth for almost ten years. My siblings and I were removed from our home and I have been in the foster care system since I was eight years old. It's always hard and difficult when as a child you are not allowed to see your parents every morning as you wake up and every night before you go to bed. It hurts to wake up in a complete stranger's home and having to live by some else's rules, not able to do what you want and needing to do everything they ask of you. While struggling and having to accept my fate of being a foster youth, my world was devastated when at twelve years old I found out that my father, who I still loved very much, had passed away. I didn't know what to do. After he died, my mother never tried to fight to get us back and we were all put up for adoption or guardianship. While my younger siblings were all adopted, I was left in the system and eventually was taken guardianship of. It was hard for me because I felt I was only in that home to do all the chores and felt like I was being treated like a slave. I was never treated equally as the other children living in the same home. I was never given thanks for all that I was responsible to do. I had run away so many times, I lost count. Every time I ran, the police would just bring me back to the same home. Each time, they all told me

there was nothing they could do, because I was in guardianship and I didn't have a social worker. One day, things got so bad everything exploded. My guardian grabbed me and we ended up hitting one another. Even though I was hit first, I am the one that was arrested and charged by the police. Before I knew it, I was back in the system and placed in the Interim Home, which is a shelter and group home for youths. That is the day I met Uncle Kalani of the Independent Living Program, who was already waiting for me. I was really drawn towards Uncle Kalani as he talked to me and for some reason, he gave me the will to hold on. He told me about the ILP program, which really interested me knowing that it was program supporting youths in the foster care system. He gave me the opportunity to be with other foster youths that had the same challenges and obstacles that I was going through. I started attending the Independent Living Program. Even my high school counselors knew of the ILP and told me the program would help. I have been a part of the Independent Living Program for two years now. We learn a lot of things to prepare us to become successful adults, but most of all, I learned a lot about who I am. This program has helped me to open up more to who I truly am inside and shown me what I never seen in myself before. Before I used to be so

angry and careless most of the time and never stopped to think why. Much more has happened since I started the program and having trusted guides like Uncle Warren and Uncle Kalani. I am learning how to deal with my frustrations, my challenges and overcoming obstacles because of all the help and support they've given me and other foster youths like me. I've become more thoughtful about my future and expected to graduate this year. I have been accepted to attend Hawaii Community College and participate in the Culinary Arts program. My future goal is to graduate and one day open my own restaurant. I think this program is good for youths in foster care. The staff in the Independent Living Program allows us to be and find our true selves. It helps us to be more open and not hold everything inside. We cannot always find solutions to the problems we are confronted with everyday, but the foster youths in the program has a safe place we can all share the same burdens together. Personally, I've found something coming to ILP that I have been missing for a long, long time and that's family and to me, that's deep. We really treat each other as family and the staff treat us as their own children. Instead of anger and frustration, I am overwhelmed with joy and happiness. That's something not a lot of foster youth are able to feel. Thank you for taking the time to read my story.